

# learning for social change

the methodological

the organisational

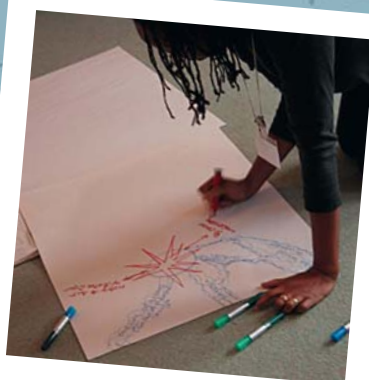
the conceptual

exploring concepts,  
methods & practice

from the Facilitating Learning  
for Social Change workshop



edited by  
Peter Taylor  
Andrew Deak  
Jethro Pettit &  
Isabel Vogel



Institute of  
Development Studies

## **Learning for Social Change**

### **Exploring concepts, methods and practice**

Peter Taylor, Andrew Deak, Jethro Pettit and Isabel Vogel

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## The Reflective Way...

*Yesterday...social change seemed so far away  
Now I know the personal's here to stay  
I believe in the reflective way*

*Suddenly we're twice the people that we used  
to be  
There's a transformation...socially!  
I believe in the reflective way.*

*Why ego had to go...  
I just don't know. It couldn't stay.  
Change meant more to me  
So for me, the reflective way.*

*Yesterday...social change seemed so far away  
Now I know the personal's here to stay  
I believe in the reflective way*

**Written by participants  
(the "personal dimension" group)  
in the FLASC workshop, and dedicated  
to all those who, through words and  
deeds, have and will continue to  
contribute to dialogue on Facilitating  
Learning for Social Change.**

*The risk, or course, is that  
we all sing the same song  
and congratulate each  
other, but maybe we can  
prevent it by designing a  
hard-to-get horizon in our  
discussions, highlighting  
some topics*

**Alfonso Gumucio**

**T**his document is an outcome of a dialogue on facilitating learning for social change (FLASC) which took place through e-fora and an international workshop in the Spring of 2006. As an editorial team based at the Institute of Development Studies, we have prepared this report as a reflection of the words and actions shared through the dialogue. We have also incorporated contributions from several workshop participants throughout the following pages. We take responsibility for our expression of the following views, which represent our interpretation of the wider vision and perspectives shared during the dialogue. We present these views as a way to provoke further debate, critical reflection and, we hope, action that will contribute to both understanding and practice which facilitates learning for social change.

The FLASC dialogue was needed because the notion that the knowledge and models required for professionalism and problem-solving are held in the hands of a few individual or organisational experts is in ever greater doubt. Instead, we are challenged to create more effective learning environments in which all who engage may develop capacities to access, create and share knowledge, and to engage critically with that which is already known and recorded. We need also to explore ways in which all those who participate in learning processes may discover what it means to adapt, innovate and apply their knowledge and skills within specific and rapidly changing contexts. We need to find ways to represent, communicate and give access to a broader range of knowledge that can both enrich and challenge more formalised structures and systems. This may enable the act of communication itself to be used as a method of social learning, constructing knowledge, raising issues and changing society. In developing these multi-faceted approaches to learning, there is a need to better understand the relationships between personal, organisational and wider societal processes of learning and change, and for innovative conceptual and methodological methodologies for integrating these.

There is so much we need to know and learn, but just as importantly, we need to understand why and how we know and learn, and to use these processes and capacities critically and reflectively if a real contribution is to be made to social change.

We thank all those who have engaged in this dialogue to help address these issues, and we look forward to opening it up to a wider circle of interested individuals, groups and organisations. Participants from different parts of the world, from a range of types of organisational setting, and with various forms of experience and background have each brought a tremendous richness and diversity to the proceedings, which we hope are reflected in the following pages. We are grateful also to the Ford Foundation for their support in making this initiative possible.

*The Editorial Team: Peter Taylor, Andrew Deak, Jethro Pettit and Isabel Vogel.*

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# Overview

“We haven’t made many inroads into mainstream institutions (academic or practitioner), we haven’t put much of a dent in conventional paradigms of knowledge, we haven’t made this a public conversation about issues that really matter, and we haven’t changed the incentive systems that lie at the heart of current practice.”

Michael Edwards

## Facilitating learning for social change - building a dialogue to span the global and the local

**Is learning important? The answer, inevitably, depends on what we mean by "learning". The gut reaction is to say "yes, of course", but perhaps we respond in this way without first reflecting on what, how and why we learn.**

In the context of efforts to support social change in a globalising world, we need to question even more our understanding of learning. And we need to go beyond this to explore our experiences and understandings of social change, how knowledge is generated and contributes to such change, and the processes by which learning is facilitated.

In this report, social change is described as "a process of dialogue, debate and action resulting in major shifts in social norms, and is generally characterised by the highlighting and legitimisation of discordant voices, particularly of those marginalised in society, and leading to improvements in their rights, entitlements and living conditions".

We, the editors of this document, believe that global forces are channelling voices of the world's citizens into ever narrower spaces; the influence of increasingly powerful economic, cultural, social and political ideologies are becoming the mainstream. Those who think and see the world differently find it harder to make their voices heard. Knowledge becomes the currency of the powerful, as a means of legitimating and communicating the acceptable, and relegating knowledge that is seen of less worth to the sidelines. The potential for positive social change thus becomes ever more distant on the horizon, as knowledge which may fuel it becomes harder to find, and the voices of those who have so much to share and contribute become even harder to hear. Institutions that claim to support and facilitate learning in turn become purveyors of information and propagators of knowledge that fits within existing paradigms. Organisations become weighed down by inertia, unable to learn themselves, or to support the learning of others.

This is a critical moment, and we need to act. Unpacking the meanings of "learning", "knowledge", "facilitation" and "social change" is not just an idle academic pursuit. In order to really grasp meanings of our reality, we can not rely solely on those forms of knowledge which are codified, held and transmitted between individuals and groups. We also learn by doing and being, by reflecting critically on our experience and actions in the world, and by testing the understanding that emanates from this through practice. And we need to share our learning, to build knowledge collectively with others that enriches society everywhere, for the benefit of all, rather than a powerful minority.

“ Learning for social change is about increasing the space for active participation, inclusion and increasing the ability to make choices

Russell Kerkhoeven

## Why is this dialogue needed and what can it achieve?

To address these challenges, we need to explore ways in which diverse forms of knowledge, occurring at different levels and expressed in multiple ways, can be acknowledged as being just as valid, useful and important as that which is deemed acceptable to the emerging "knowledge society". And to become acceptable, we need to better understand in both practice and theory how such knowledge is shared and communicated, and how in turn it contributes to processes of social change.

In this document we have imagined an integrated framework that encompasses four dimensions, around which we believe an ongoing dialogue between activists and organisations is needed:

**The conceptual:** we need to **conceptualise the relationship between knowledge, learning and social change**, linking different forms of knowledge and learning to strategies for action for social change, all based on clearly articulated sets of assumptions and principles; we should draw on academic theory as a means of reinforcing organizational capacity to bring about social change

**The personal:** we need to **emphasise and integrate the personal in processes of social change**, increasing our understanding of the many ways in which individuals learn or resist learning, and draw on this understanding to support communication and knowledge generation through "doing and being" as well as through analytical and conceptual sense-making.

**The organisational:** we need to **support the development of "learning organisations"**, and strengthen the connection of these to other organisations, networks and wider society; we should consider the most appropriate size of organisations that is conducive for learning, or develop, through the use of appropriate methods, the realignment of those that are too unwieldy.

**The methodological:** we need to **foster and use appropriate methods** that support the emergence of group identity, whilst allowing individual identities based on different sets of values and beliefs to flourish and shape group identity; we should also encourage use of methods that help to create an organisational learning culture which enhance processes of both learning and unlearning; and we need to clarify the knowledge, worldview and assumptions that underlie these methods.

It is our position that unless we consider and understand the interplay of all these dimensions, we will not be able to facilitate learning that enriches and contributes to positive social change. Organisations and institutions will fail to engage with the personal, resulting in alienation and missed opportunities. A lack of a conceptual framework for initiatives and interventions will result in disappointment and further exclusion of the voices that need to be heard.

In order to facilitate learning for positive social change, we need to maintain an ongoing and active dialogue with a wide range of activists and organisations. We believe that we can achieve this by:

- sharing and learning from real-life examples of individual change agents and organisations that have achieved a working synergy between social and personal transformation
- exploring the potential of existing institutions and even new institutions to support the facilitation of learning for social change
- developing a range of practical methods and approaches that can be used to enable learning and unlearning for positive social change, including meeting the multi-faceted learning needs of individuals working as change agents, and learning how to support social change beyond the organisation
- inquiring cooperatively into the theories of knowledge, worldviews and assumptions that underlie these methods.





# Workshop background and process

## Why "facilitating learning for social change"?

**T**he constant encounter of diversity, complexity, change, knowledge and learning raises particular challenges for our understandings of how knowledge is created in relation to social change.

These challenges are as relevant in the global North as in the global South, where assumptions behind mainstream models and epistemologies for learning and social change are coming into question in equal measure. Participation in development processes, and participatory approaches in communication and education, have emerged as a means of not only promoting inclusion, but as a means of recognising and shifting power structures, and contributing to social change and transformation. This includes a recognition that knowledge is a means of propagating power; hence participation must involve discourse around both power and knowledge. This has economic, ideological and organisational implications for institutions that provide and aim to facilitate learning and communication programmes that may contribute ultimately to social change.



Questioning is taking place increasingly, within institutions that promote and facilitate learning, communication and capacity building, and amongst researchers who inquire into concepts of knowledge and reflective practice, practitioners engaged in the interface between knowledge and policy processes, and members and collaborators of NGOs and civil society organisations. A group of interested individuals based at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK, felt it would be very valuable to connect with others facing and exploring similar challenges, and to re-examine how their approaches to knowledge, learning and communication may be either contributing to solutions or reinforcing problems.

## Introducing the FLASC initiative

With support from the Ford Foundation, and convened by a team at IDS, an initiative was established with the goal of facilitating more effective learning for social change through a better understanding and integration of theory, experience and practice of reflection and learning. The programme intended to address learning for social change through a framework of three key dimensions:

- **the personal:**

involves understanding how personal transformations in learning, thinking and action come about and what limits this; the influences of how we learn, how we see the world and how theory relates to our personal practice and experience; developing capacity as reflexive practitioners; how people's implicitly-held ways of being, knowledge and theories influence their practice and learning; and potential links and synergies through drawing together a field of diverse perspectives, including psychological and psychotherapeutic approaches;



- **the organisational:**

much inquiry and analysis at the organisational level, originates from private sector experience and does not explicitly address aspects of power and knowledge creation, and their closely related roles in driving or reproducing social processes. Organisations may also be viewed only as formal structures bound by common sets of vision and purpose; for our inquiry it seems wise to move beyond this understanding, to include groups, communities of practice, and associations and networks that are connected to a specific local context. There is a need also to understand the processes that connect personal and organisational innovation; theories of organisational types and learning; incentives and power relations within institutions;

- **the institutional:**

involves ways in which particular people and organisations link into wider systems of influence involving local, national and global actors, including professional associations which bridge the personal and the organisational dimensions; participatory systems of communication – as means of both creating and expressing knowledge that can engage with the norms, attitudes, behaviours and power relations that underlie social exclusion; knowledge and policy processes; actor-network approaches; power relations - and how these wider processes might enable or constrain transformations and spread of ideas emanating from particular people and organisations.

Considering the huge diversity encompassed by these three dimensions, an idea emerged of bringing together, virtually and face-to-face, a group of persons from different backgrounds and organisations with a common interest in exploring questions and challenges, but who normally would not have an opportunity to meet, discuss and share ideas in a focused way. We wanted to consider experiences or stories that emanate from particular contexts as a means of exploring our understanding of learning in greater depth, the relationships between learning at the three different levels, and the process of facilitation that provides a flow between them. We saw modes, methods and approaches of communication becoming integral elements of the facilitation process, of learning within these different dimensions, and of social change itself. We hoped to identify certain processes or principles of learning that are most conducive to progressive social change outcomes, and to think how capacity could be built in those engaged in social change efforts that enable them to be reflective, innovative and adaptive in facilitating such learning processes.

### **The participants, and the process**

The initiative involved two main components; an international workshop for 28 participants (researchers, academics, educators, NGO/civil society representatives, donor representatives); and two moderated e-fora, one before and one after the workshop. Participants were identified according to their involvement in:

- researching, developing and applying concepts of knowledge and reflective learning for social change
- developing and applying pedagogical, communication and facilitation tools, methods and techniques which support reflective learning
- supporting and facilitating policy processes and capacity development initiatives for both institutions and individuals, within which reflection on learning, and linking of theory, experience and practice are key components

“Can we imagine new forms of reflexive institution, learning alliance or discourse coalition which allow space for multiple rationalities, enable people to see and reflect their institutional and political origins, and open up genuine debate about alternative approaches? What might these look like, for different issues, settings and scales? Or is this pie in the sky?”

Melissa Leach

*Social change is the transformation of power relationships so that people who are usually powerless and left behind – poor people, women, visible minorities and other excluded groups – are sufficiently organized to have a strong voice and influence and to make progress when major institutions make significant decisions on economic, social or political issues which affect them and their communities.*

Andrew Mott

The first e-forum took place in February 2006. A concept note was prepared as an input, and participants were invited to contribute initial thoughts, questions, ideas and experiences to start off the dialogue. A key feature of the e-forum was an exchange of personal history and interest in the initiative which helped participants to begin to know each other, as well as providing a valuable opportunity for initial reflections before the workshop itself.

In addition to the sharing of several case studies which illustrated processes of learning from social change, a number of contributions addressed understandings and interpretations of social change. These included:

- transformations of power relationships so that people who are usually powerless and left behind – poor people, women, visible minorities and other excluded groups – are sufficiently organized to have a strong voice and influence and to make progress when major institutions make significant decisions on economic, social or political issues which affect them and their communities;
- a transformation of relationships to increase choice or space for choices and by doing that to move away from a detrimental situation of exclusion;
- underlying shifts in social and cultural values, norms and worldviews (and the ways in which these are reproduced) as a necessary structural and psychological transition, running parallel to more visible and episodic changes in agency and power relations.

These reflections were invaluable as a way of creating an open space for dialogue, which could be continued within the workshop itself.

### The workshop

The workshop took place over 3 days (1-3 March, 2006) at Dunford House, Sussex in the UK. During the event we encountered different stories and experiences, for example communication approaches and methods related to HIV/AIDS, working with community development in rural areas of Uganda, use of ICTs in India as a means of sharing knowledge and information, and many more. This very wide range of backgrounds and experience provided a wonderful repository of knowledge and practice for further critical reflection. It created also a challenge in finding where common interests lay, and establishing foundations for discussion within a framework whose boundaries seemed to shift constantly.

The workshop was facilitated by four members of the Institute of Development Studies, but efforts were made to ensure engagement with other participants in the facilitation process. Ultimately these inputs were crucial in the actual process that unfolded. It was intended from the start that the workshop approach would be participatory, incorporating plenary and group discussions, personal reflection, and methods that would stimulate participation in different ways.

The workshop process began with a sharing of individual stories of social change, based on an individual reflection of a social change story from each participant's own experience or observation. These were visualised individually, and then shared in small groups with the purpose of exploring the story at a deeper level, drawing on questions such as:





- What social change took place? What changes in norms of thinking, behaviour and relationships were identified?
- What interventions, strategies and actions occurred?
- What motivations and incentives were at work?
- What knowledge was generated, was this communicated more widely, and if so, how?
- What processes of learning occurred, who learned, what, how, from whom?

The participant introductions during the e-forum helped greatly in moving us to a point where each person was ready to engage in dialogue. The initial group discussions helped to pinpoint a wide range of examples of social change processes, in which knowledge had been generated and in some cases communicated, thus contributing to wider learning.

During the first day we heard a wealth of diverse stories with opportunity for reflection, and a real questioning of basic concepts and issues. We recognised by the end of day one that in this workshop we should, collectively, challenge our assumptions about learning, social change and knowledge, not to agree on definitions, but to show difference. To do this we realised our need for energy and creativity, to build on our individual interests, but to push beyond these. We acknowledged that we should not take things for granted, and that we should not remain comfortable with the safety of common ground. Managing this in practice was challenging however. The box below describes a process by which we felt we managed to achieve this difficult task.

### **Provocative statements and questions - and some responses elicited**

#### ***Facilitators knowingly lead a process to a predetermined outcome***

- Facilitators are often working for the most powerful person/people in the process
- Do facilitators need to recognise and manage their power?
- It can be a big personal challenge to allow conclusions to be emergent

#### ***Knowledge is valuable even if it is not communicated***

- Knowledge is not a commodity but a mental process based on communication
- Is knowledge about filling an empty drum or about lighting the fire under the drum?
- What about knowledge and ways of knowing that are devalued, marginalised and valuable but therefore unavailable?

### **Opening the doors for dialogue – inspirations for moving us forward**

By the end of the first day, a sense of excitement and anticipation had arisen, but this was coupled with a real wonder of how we could help the dialogue move forward in a constructive and energising way. On the evening of the first day, the facilitators invited anyone interested to join them in planning the process for the next day. Conversations also continued in the bar and at dinner, and inevitably there was a sharing of similar feelings encountered in other contexts. Ideas and practices were suggested by several participants, drawing on how they had navigated such complex territory themselves, and coupled with a very intensive process meeting, a tentative process emerged for the second day.

Two key "breakthrough" ideas found their way into the programme for day 2:

1. Starting the day with a plenary session in which "provocative statements" were prepared and posted, a different statement in four locations of the room. Participants were invited to tour these statements and to discuss each in turn with whoever they found with them at that moment. Participants could also write comments, questions, reactions or ideas beside the statement if they wished. Apart from generating some very interesting ideas, this activity was energising for everyone, and seemed to re-open the channels of reflection and communication which has seemed to have narrowed at the end of the first tiring day.

2. Participants were then asked to divide into four groups, based on four key strands that the process group had identified as providing a framework for further discussion:

- Conceptual dimensions
- Organisational dimensions
- Methodological dimensions
- Personal dimensions.

***Social change is largely an outcome of unintended consequences, and little to do with organised intentions***

- Incremental change is a necessary process for more profound transformations to occur – change is not steady and linear
- You must be in a state of readiness, willing to shift to whatever issue or movement emerges which has the energy to bring about social change.

***We only learn to confirm what we already know***

- A great challenge is becoming aware of one's mindset and predispositions and the **unlearning** to allow **learning**
- Society sometimes rewards consistency more than openness to new ideas, changes in goals or strategies ("stay the course")

Having done so, each group was asked to discuss and then pose a set of questions that they wished each of the other groups to respond to, one question per group, including a question to themselves. Participants all met again in plenary, where the questions were read out, clarified and "presented" to each of the groups in turn. Each group then retreated with the questions they had been given, with the task of considering each and reporting back to the plenary by the end of the day, in the first instance using either non-dialogical or alternative forms of expression. Some wonderful performances ensued; an hilarious drama illustrating various forms of power within the social change process; a dramatic non-verbal illustration of "learning of facilitation"; a song which transformed "Yesterday" into "The Reflective Way" (for full text, see the beginning of this report), and an enactment of organisations resistant to learning, revealing the force that social movements play when there is effective and widespread mobilization for institutional change or reform.

This process created a real sense of dynamism, particularly as a feeling of responsibility to the other groups had been engendered. The output of each group was quite remarkable (see next section of this document), and probably formed the backbone of the outcomes from the entire event. For most participants, day 2 of the workshop provided a real focus, a sense of direction, a feeling of individual and mutual learning, and perhaps most importantly, some "bloody good fun" to quote the words of one participant.

The process described in the box above created a real sense of enthusiasm and energy for the final day of the workshop, as well as a series of valuable outputs. Groups identified a series of useful strategies for moving the inquiry forward, including a series of cooperative inquiries based around issues of particular interest to individuals; further mapping and development of the conceptual framework; sharing and development of useful methodologies and pedagogies for communication, learning and social change; an exploration of the relationship of the personal to the other three dimensions; a reimagining of "institutions" engaged in social change processes; and a need to further explore meanings and understandings of learning and social change.

Finally, participants had a chance to articulate their own personal interests in relation to FLASC, summarised as follows:

- Starting something "big" with this group
- Frameworks, stories and mapping
- Encouraging learning cultures in organisations
- Horizontal learning from below
- Developing and applying reflective practice
- New institutions, partnerships and spaces
- Issues of accountability
- FLASC in higher education institutions
- Individual actions

## Moving off and moving on

By the end of the third day, most participants were feeling the effects of a tiring and difficult journey undertaken through this event. As we bade our farewells to each other and to Dunford, there was a real sense of achievement in the outputs of the groups on the four dimensions, but also a feeling of uncertainty on how to proceed. The second planned e-forum promoted limited further exchanges on the issues raised at Dunford, but a series of direct telephone conversations with the majority of participants (again a recommendation of one of the workshop groups) was very valuable in getting a sense of where individual interests lie, and how personal ideas, experiences and desires for change might be channelled into further action and learning. This really was the major test for all participants in this initiative; how and where should we now move on, as individuals, or as collective groups, hopefully engaging with others who could not participate in the workshop or who, as yet, have not been engaged with.



In the next section of this document, we present the main highlights that emanated from the discussions of four main themes that became core to the event. We follow these with some personal reflections from participants, on their experience of participating in this dialogue, their own learning, and thoughts on how we might move forward.

# Key outcomes of the dialogue

**T**hrough the FLASC initiative, four key dimensions have emerged which provide fertile ground for further exploration of facilitating learning for social change. These are:

- **conceptual**
- **personal**
- **organisational**
- **methodological**

*The best route to social transformation lies through the synthesis of action, learning and personal change.*

Michael Edwards

In the following pages, a short exploration of each of these four dimensions is presented, based on presentations by groups, and feedback on these presentations both during and after the workshop. Not everything discussed in the workshop is included, nor should these explorations be seen as a finished product. They are included here as a way of encouraging further dialogue and debate.

We should note that there were both dialogical and non-dialogical aspects to the presentations. Such rich forms of expression are invariably difficult to describe in a written report, but we hope that in this section, a flavour is provided of some of the main issues and ideas that were covered. We have made an effort also to situate these outputs within some of the existing literature in order to promote further exploration of the issues raised. Each dimension is presented in the form of a dialogue around a series of questions.

As we will explain in the following pages, one of these four dimensions, the personal, appears to be hugely undervalued and unappreciated in terms of its criticality for facilitation of learning and change processes. For this reason, we wanted also to allow the voices of individual participants in the FLASC dialogue to come through. We follow the presentation of each dimension with a personal reflection by a workshop participant. Space does not allow all voices to be heard in this way, but those included here, we believe, give a sense of the range of opinion and interest in this dialogue, as well as some valuable reflections on where we might go from here.

# 1: The conceptual dimension

**S**ummary: Here we offer a framework which we believe will help us to conceptualise ‘facilitating learning for social change’. The framework offers provisional definitions of learning, knowledge, information, and social change. It also shows the linkages and flows from assumptions about social change, strategies for action for social change, and forms of knowledge and learning. This flow is grounded in reality, out of which there is ‘raw’ information. The process is constituted by social actors making choices and engaged in dialogue. The flow then weaves its way through an interplay between power and facilitative processes. The whole picture is of course embedded in a particular ‘context’.

*I'm tired of repeating that communication is not the same as information, but most decision makers still use one or the other word without distinction...*

Alfonso Gumucio

*Learning requires an open attitude and a willingness also to share experiences which are somewhat sensitive.*

Henk Molenaar

## What is the range of useful meanings of facilitation, learning, knowledge?

A number of key meanings emerged through the exploration of the conceptual dimension of FLASC - these help give guidance to the use of terms in the framework, and should be interpreted in the context in which they were used:

- **Information** is reality – raw or cooked, where ‘raw’ is the initial result of individual cognitive processes and ‘cooked’ the result of further processing, individually or collectively, via different forms of knowledge and learning.
- **Knowledge** is the sense people make of information, but there is a range of different kinds of knowledge and learning that can be useful in strategies for social change, including: codified, emotional, discursive, tacit, revealed, collective, individual, expert, lay, experiential, insight, practical, craft, wisdom, dialogical ....
- **Learning** is the acquisition of knowledge.
- Facilitation is the process of enabling social actors to reflect on their assumptions and make informed choices about approaches to and forms of knowledge and learning to use in strategies for social change.
- **Social change** is a process of dialogue, debate and action resulting in major shifts in social norms, and is generally characterised by the highlighting and legitimisation of discordant voices, particularly of those marginalised in society, and leading to improvements in their rights, entitlements and living conditions.
- **Societal change**, or the process of ‘how history happens’, refers to the long-term processes that shape societies and within which social actors strive to bring about social change.
- **Social actors** are the individuals, groups, collective movements, organizations, institutions which undertake actions to bring about social change.



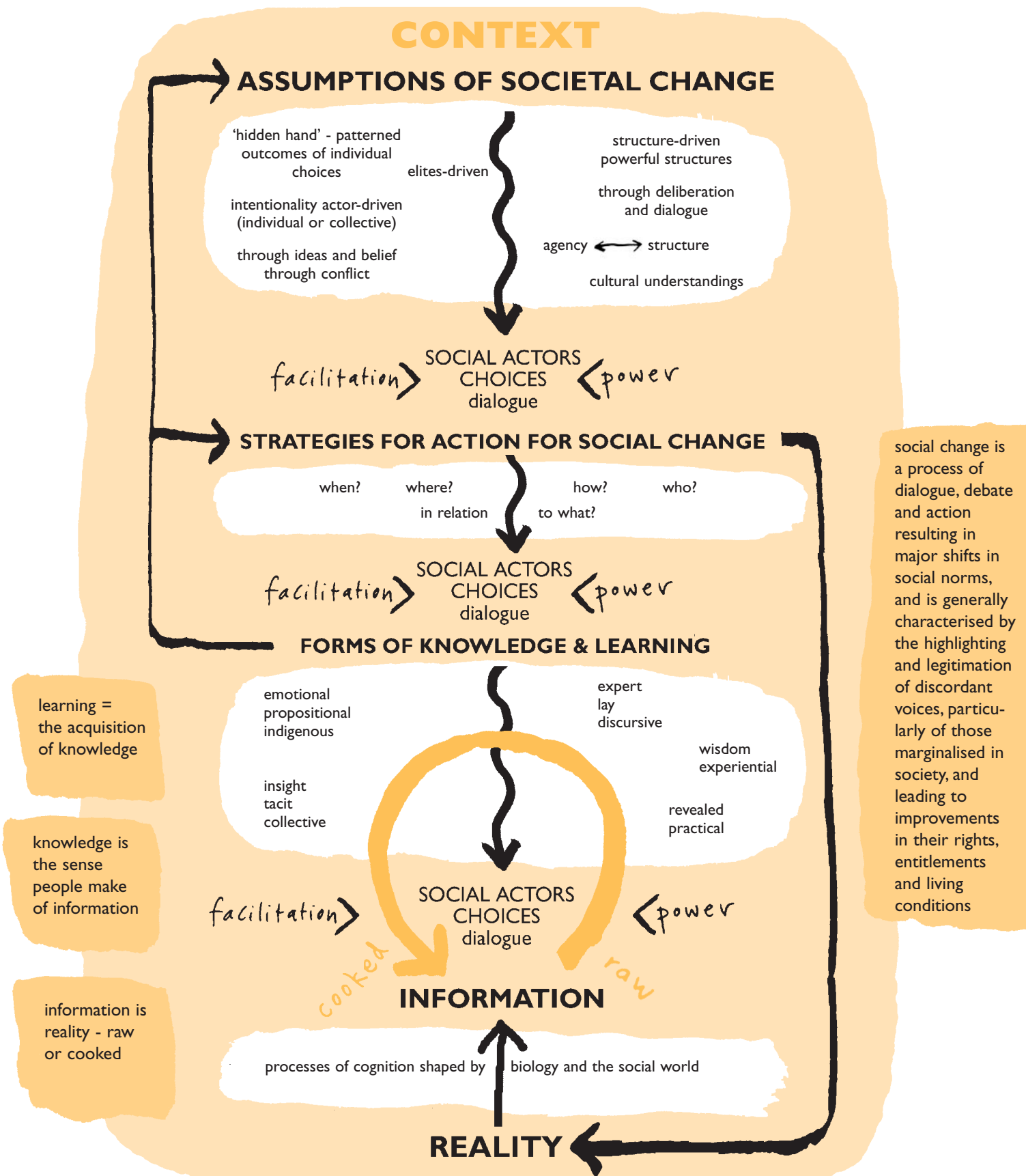
- **Choices** are the decision areas that social actors face when developing their strategies for action and represent key points where the breadth of the choices available to them can be constrained by power relations, restricting their scope for action and ability to bring about social change. The points at which choices are made offer opportunities for facilitation to help confront power relations and open up a greater breadth of choices for social actors, the assumption being that drawing on the broadest possible range of choices should help make the strategy for action for social change more likely to succeed.
- **Context** is the specific context for action which varies with each case, and includes physical reality, social relationships, communication processes and knowledge flows etc.

### **How can we conceptualise the relationship between knowledge, learning and social change?**

A key outcome of the FLASC workshop is a conceptual framework that aims to provide a visual representation of the relationships between knowledge, learning and social change. It is not a 'model' of how things happen, but rather an initial attempt to map how these concepts might interrelate at different stages of learning and action to support progressive social change. The stages and relationships are iterative and dynamic, often simultaneous, so the flow can start at any point within the framework.



## A conceptual framework for further dialogue



## How can we interpret this framework?

The framework is based on a flow which can be considered in two main parts:

### a) From reality to forms of knowledge and learning:

Within any context, reality is interpreted by a person's process of cognition, shaped by human biology and the social world. This input creates 'information', which is at this stage 'raw'.

The raw information is 'cooked' into knowledge through a sense-making process that involves communication, dialogue, exchange, filtering, triangulation, experience to build an understanding of reality (this can be a collective process as well as individual one). This sense-making and learning process can take different forms and result in different types of knowledge, including emotional, tacit, experiential, insight. So, knowledge could be gained through direct experience or academic process; it could be revealed through meditation or contemplation, or it could be imparted by experts or community elders, to name only a few of the many possibilities. No one type of knowledge is inherently better than another; the value attached to any particular type just depends on what could be relevant in each context, as judged by the social actor/s.

New understandings of how the mind works, particularly the ability to consciously achieve greater clarity, help illuminate the cognitive and sense-making processes and provide a basis for consciously opening the mind to a broader range of knowledges. The illumination of processes of cognition shaped by biology and the social world can open us to a broader and different range of types of knowledge and learning.

Power relations constrain or broaden the choices of sense-making or learning processes available to the social actor/s to build their understandings e.g. who they can dialogue with, what types of knowledge are valid and valued, how they are able to communicate their perspectives etc.

### b) From forms of knowledge and learning to strategies for action for social change, via assumptions of societal change

All of these types of knowledge are potentially useful to draw on to develop strategies for action for social change. However, power relations create hierarchies of knowledge authority – what is valued as the 'right' kind of knowledge - which constrain the choices of knowledge available to the social actor/s and privilege the strategies of those actors able to gain and make use of the dominant knowledge.

Facilitation has a crucial role to play at the point at which a particular type of knowledge is chosen:

- to help draw out a range of different types of knowledge which could be equally valuable in building the social actor/s' understanding of reality and the changes they wish to bring about;
- to help create the space for the social actor/s to assess which type of knowledge is most useful as a basis for action through dialogue and debate
- to support their power to choose which forms of knowledge and learning to draw on in developing their strategies for action.

The social actor/s could move on to developing their strategies for action for social change at this point. However, strategies for action could be further strengthened if the social actor/s could broaden the range of their understanding about how societal change happens. Assumptions and different understandings about how change happens are often deeply buried yet directly shape strategies for action (so in effect, our assumptions about societal change lead us to predict that if you do "x", then "y" will result). These understandings can be expressed in any number of ways: interpretations of academic theories of societal change (some examples given in the framework), cultural understandings, beliefs, and more.

Facilitation at this point could help uncover and examine the assumptions currently guiding the social actor/s, and could also help present alternative understandings of how change happens that would broaden the options for developing their strategies for action.

Academic knowledge can also be helpful at this point as it lends itself to building a 'big picture' of historical change and can offer a great range of alternative understandings about why and how societal change happens. However, academic knowledge has to be communicated in a way that enables social actor/s to make sense of it and make use of it as just one of many types of potentially useful knowledge.

### **How can we make sure academic theory reinforces organizational capacity to bring about social change?**

As noted above, academic knowledge needs to be communicated appropriately and in an accessible way that social actors can make use of. If this is achieved, then academic theory can reinforce organisational capacity to bring about social change by:

- identifying processes of societal change
- throwing light on how information is processed from raw reality to different forms of knowledge
- providing one of the many forms of knowledge that social activists can draw upon and is particularly useful for understanding current and historical contexts.
- supporting the uncovering of assumptions



'Social change was defined as "a process of dialogue, debate and action resulting in substantial shifts in social norms generally characterised by the highlighting and legitimisation of discordant voices, particularly of those most marginalised in society."

### **Reflection - James Deane**

Communication for Social Change Consortium

### **At the FLASC meeting, a group of us focused on developing a conceptual framework for Knowledge, Learning and Social Change.**

*The framework is summarised elsewhere in this report. At the heart of this framework is an argument that social change is profoundly shaped by the choices social actors make, and that the character of those choices is significantly determined through dialogue and information. For those interested in catalysing progressive social change I, it makes sense – suggests this framework - to invest in those areas which most shape the quality of its outcome. In other words, there are strong reasons to invest in improving the quality of the dialogue process through which people make decisions, the quality of the information on which they make them and in the opportunities they have to articulate, communicate and organise around the conclusions they reach.*

*This is not, of course, an especially remarkable conclusion. Participatory development practitioners have long been centrally interested in the quality of the dialogue process, including in factors such as whose voices are most heard, the quality and typologies of the information on which it is based and identifying the opportunities that exist for translating dialogue into action. However, the model does provide some important additional insights into this process, not least in relation to where development agencies interested in supporting social change processes can best focus their investments. Currently very limited development investments are made in these areas, and what investments are made tend to be structured in ways that are inimical to intelligently designed interventions (particularly in relation to issues of timeframes and impact measurement).*

*It also further strengthens the rationale for developing greater synergies between those involved in participatory development and those involved in participatory communication and communication for social change strategies. If the quality and characteristics of the information available to social actors in making decisions plays an important part in shaping their choices, it becomes important to explore what sources of information are available to people. This is a communication as well as a participatory development challenge and suggests, among many other issues, a stronger focus on issues related to the media (content, access, structure etc) and on other forms of information, including through information and communication technologies (particularly increasing access to mobile telephony).*

*It also implies a stronger focus on how dialogue and debate at a community level (including those explicitly through facilitated processes) can inform and influence dialogue and debate at a broader societal level. Again the role of the media and other communication processes in amplifying and communicating perspectives and providing broader arenas for debate and dialogue becomes a more urgent area of attention. The potential of the media in communicating and amplifying both individual and community voices becomes especially relevant here. It also, incidentally, raises some challenges in determining what can be defined as mediated dialogue. As discussed briefly at the meeting, can a talk show or discussion programme on the radio constitute facilitated dialogue?*



*Creating stronger linkages between those involved in participatory development and those in participatory communication was the subject of a meeting that took place shortly after the Sussex conference bringing together practitioners and thinkers from both fields ([link to report?](#)). This identified strong potential learnings and synergies between the two fields, as well as some potentially important missed opportunities that existed in the past in sharing approaches. The more I reflect on both the Sussex FLASC meeting and this one, the more I feel that we have only scratched the surface of the dynamics, interactions and learnings that can be made by a more insistent and structured dialogue between the two. The time, spaces and opportunities are not easily available for such a dialogue.*

*It is likely that media and communication issues are likely to become a higher priority for development agencies, principally because of their increasing interest in the context of governance issues (a test of this will be the forthcoming Dfid White Paper). There are a number of unusual and interesting processes currently underway in the media and communication field (including a World Congress on Communication for Development in Rome in October, and a potentially important Africa wide consultation process designed to generate an African driven agenda on media and communication issues entitled the Strengthening African Media Process). If these issues begin to move from the periphery more the mainstream of development thinking (which will inevitably take time), the opportunities for a greater synergy between all methodologies centrally concerned in enhancing voice in the development process may increase.*

The communication and participatory development fields could do much to realise those opportunities, and the FLASC meeting certainly encouraged me greatly in that belief.

One final reflection is that the conceptual model was drawn up by a small number of people from different backgrounds over a short period of time. That was part of its beauty but there was little time to discuss, critique or improve it within the broader group. One potentially startling characteristic, at least at first glance, is its linearity. This was in part determined by the shape of the paper it was drawn on! An improvement would be a redrawing into a more circular and dynamic framework.



## 2: The personal dimension

**S**ummary: the personal dimension is, we believe, often neglected, but is of fundamental importance to learning for social change. It is relevant in a wide range of contexts, but is culturally contextual. We need to understand how individuals resist learning, as well as how personal influence contributes in positive and negative ways to social change organisations.

*Learning is not a detached intellectual exercise. Learning takes place in a social context that strongly influences the motivation or willingness to learn.*

Henk Molenaar

### When and where has the personal been neglected in social change, and why does it matter?

Why does the personal matter? Because it is the source, the vehicle and the driver for social change, and determines how energy is renewed. It is based on identity, and the need for individuals to be recognised as members of society. By paying attention to the personal, we are able to share learning and achieve greater congruence.

Understanding the personal and its importance requires that the personal is "unpacked". The following elements need to come together through a search for congruence:

- Meeting needs/ambitions and aspirations
- Achieving self-understanding
- Undergoing personal transformations (sometimes deriving from personal wounds or traumatic experiences) that motivate participation in social change
- Developing personal and interpersonal competencies that help make the tacit explicit (through reflective practice)

These elements appear not to be systematically addressed within the social change context (perhaps greater effort is made in other "sectors" such as health, where professions exist), and so their emergence, for example in an organisation, seems often to be serendipitous. Only through a concerted effort to address these systemically can congruence be achieved. This is not easy, however, and within certain institutional contexts may result in fear and anger being displayed against those who advocate this way forward.

The question arises as to whether this area is well-documented<sup>2</sup>, and if so, is that done in ways that are useful for others, feeding into strategies and approaches?

There seem to be few examples in significant movements for change where personal change is made explicit in the discourse of change in a broader context; the women's movement is perhaps one which has both focused on and acknowledged the criticality of personal learning and transformation. There do seem to be plenty of examples, however, where movements that are hugely influential in achieving wider social change have failed to recognise these connections, and as a result may be missing out on something absolutely intrinsic to the change process. Change happens between people; understanding this dynamic, as part of learning and seeking to understand social change, does appear relevant.

A significant way to facilitate change between people is to create space and opportunities for reflective practice<sup>3</sup>, which leads to greater congruence. Perhaps this can help lead to emergence of change agents in ways that are understood better than at present.

<sup>2</sup>What is documented are the personal stories of individuals who conceptualised, led or participated in social change events and movements. These stories take the form of (auto)biographies. The personal as focus of rigorous investigation and research is possibly less documented, even though experience suggests that it is largely individuals who learn and change rather than organisations (or movements).

<sup>3</sup>See Jos Kessels et al in Free Space (2002): *Uitgeverij Boom* – the need for 'free space' to enhance reflectivity. In their opinion this requires developing critical dialogue skills. Jos Kessels advocates a Dutch version of Socratic Dialogue-skills.



We need to be both reflective (how we see, understand and position ourselves in relation to our experience and action) and reflexive (how we reflect on the way we do this). This allows us to "surface the tacit", and to make conscious use of different forms of knowledge and knowing. It is this "tacit knowledge and learning" that appears to lie at the core of 'social learning', 'learning from experience' or 'learning in action'. These different learning modes appear to form one of the foundations of social change. They can bring about personal transformation, as is seen for example through the experiences of leaders and spokespeople who have shown themselves to be sources of knowledge and agency. Organisational transformation requires personal transformation, and personal transformation is itself facilitated by organisational transformation. However, a critical mass of people undergoing learning and transformation is needed in order to create a learning culture. This critical mass would allow individuals to learn that:

- others share their experience and can learn from it
- there are dramatically different views which need to be articulated and understood
- working collectively is hugely beneficial
- power is critical
- we can learn from failures and successes
- transformation can also be "negative", allowing ego, distance and adverse power relations to flourish

#### **What potential actions may be taken to integrate the personal dimension within wider processes of social change?**

One route could be to develop a process of inquiry<sup>4</sup> with connected stories of social change that integrate the four dimensions (personal, conceptual, organisational and methodological) and allows those involved to understand social change more holistically and through the process also contribute to social change.

Examples of actions or activities could include:

- Enhancing the quality of development actors interaction with social movements
- Direct engagement with social movements
- Identifying and facilitating abilities of individuals that support the above
- Facilitate/support shared learning across organisations and social movements
- Connect/mobilise wider circles to increase critical mass to support individuals in their own efforts to shift /engage larger arena and collectively go for those changes

Other specific steps might be to:

- find out if various aspects of "the personal dimension" has been documented (mapping)
- ascertain if it is shareable, and whether it is shared in ways that strengthen social change (communicating)
- explore the link between personal and social change through life histories (action umbrellas)

To what extent is the whole preoccupation with the "personal" a "western" assumption, particularly in terms of how it relates to social change?

There is not necessarily a preoccupation with the "personal"; there may be with "individualism", which is different. In general the connection made between the personal and social change seems terribly neglected, and there is a need for real exploration of this, rather than denial of its importance or even existence.

*I am not a specialist in communication or communication theory. All I have is experience working with the people. While I may not be able to phrase my arguments in the language of the expert, I assure you what I say is what I learnt from the field. It is the voice from the grassroots, if you may.*

Subbiah Arunachalam

<sup>4</sup>Erlandson, et al (1993) describes methods of such a process in 'Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: Sage Publications. Another approach could be Appreciative Enquiry, see Cooper, P. & McIntyre, D. (1996) *Effective Teaching and Learning: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press .

*Buddhist thinking strongly permeates my worldview which leads me to see social change as an ongoing effort through a sense of connectedness and compassion to be 'of service' to those who are suffering. Two steps forward, one step back, one step forward, two steps back, and always new important issues that merit social change. This perspective has also led me to a deep conviction of the need for personal transformation.*

Irene Guijt

*My personal interest in facilitating learning for social change started from my student days in the early 80s. As part of an all India student movement, we were concerned with making our studies and campuses relevant/useful for poor communities. "University to the masses" was our slogan. To us, social change meant achieving a different social order, in light of the unacceptable norm.*

Tom Thomas

The personal can be relevant in a wide range of settings; thus it is culturally contextual. Ways in which personal transformations relate to social transformation can be expressed within a context of group or individual based identity.

There are many different vehicles for personal transformation, including meditation, psychotherapy, peer groups, social action, religion and even crises. We should not limit ourselves to a narrow view of how personal transformation occurs. For example, a significant body of literature has been emerging recently from the world of various psychology-related disciplines (including psychotherapy – see box for references) and neuroscience on the significance of our emotional/feeling or 'affective' life to decision making, motivation and to interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships in general.

Daniel Goleman (1995), in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, writes for the intelligent lay community on these topics, drawing from a lot of contemporary research – up to 1995. The research in many associated areas continues. From the world of psychotherapy, developing creativity and a sense of self in individuals is very much about the integration of the symbolic (thinking) and affective (feeling worlds). Such thinkers and writers as William James – the famous American philosopher-psychologist of the 19th Century; Winnecott – a renowned post-war British psychoanalyst; Kohut – an American psychoanalyst who developed Psychoanalytic Self Psychology; Tompkins – an American who was the pioneer of 'Affect Theory'; Jones, JM – an American psychotherapist who developed Affect Theory as Process; Fonagy – a contemporary British psychologist/psychoanalyst based at UCL; and Meares – an Australian psychiatrist/psychotherapist who developed the 'Conversational Model'; LeDoux and Damasio as leading neuroscientists researching the 'emotional brain'; come to mind that have contributed to an understanding of the significance of the emotional/feeling/affective world and a developed sense of self.

There seems to be a real need for us as individuals to develop our creative capacities in order to tackle some of the huge social and environmental challenges we have ahead of us. These thinkers and writers, who have all drawn from a large body of professional clinical experience, have something immensely valuable to contribute towards how we go about this.

### **How do individuals learn or resist learning? And is knowing how people learn enough in itself to ensure the facilitation of social change?**

There are many resistance tactics to avoid learning, for example ignoring, devaluing, diverting, cultural apologetics and withdrawal. These may be considered 'passive' tactics, rather than individuals openly opting out and stating why. Resistance seems to occur when learning does not resonate with the lives and interests of the individual; there needs to be a connection with an individual's reality. Motivation and incentives are also important considerations and need to be looked at in greater depth.

But we need to decide if we are speaking of resistance to learning or resistance to action based on learning, assuming that learning is not complete without action, which in itself is a point for further discussion. We may acquire knowledge but then resist doing anything with it; for example in cases such as HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, or environmental threats. In any given context, what supports are there for people's learning and/or action based on that learning?

### **When working with social change organisations, how can you ensure that your personal influence contributes in a positive way? And are there examples of how the personal influence is negative?**

“My early attitudes to social change are very personal and stem from my childhood... I am continually surprised by how influential those early experiences of surviving, using and fighting the system have continued to be on my own attitudes and behaviours.”

Lawrence Haddad



This depends on whether we are working in or with an organisation. "In" is perceived as more difficult (due to power relations and resource competition) than "with", when attempting to:

- Align values and create meaningful ways to verify, and challenge/critique this alignment or compatibility in a mutual exchange
- Construct space deliberately and provide opportunity for feedback and transparency; this will not happen unless mechanisms are constructed or created
- Achieve safety in relationships

Feedback mechanisms (e.g. 360 degree) can help develop the personal, but mechanisms are needed also for dealing with feedback.

The personal influence can be negative when a charismatic leader is involved. Although such a leader can be inspirational and support change, advance issues and debate, or mobilise people, forces and resources, there is also the problem of "founder syndrome", where a leader is reluctant to let the reins loose and discourages others from following and adapting. This can stifle the rise of new leadership and the development of healthy organisations.

### A selection of writers and references on the personal dimension – lessons from psychology and psychotherapy

Writers and References

**William James** – famous American psychologist/philosopher who expanded on the notion of self in the 19th Century:

James, W. 1890, *Principles of Psychology*. Holt, New York.

**Jonathon Brown** - writes an excellent contemporary and readable book on 'the self':

Brown, J. D. 1998, *The Self*. McGraw-Hill, USA.

**Heinz Kohut** – formulated the theory of the self from a psychoanalytic perspective – put a significant emphasis on the empathic mode of data gathering from within a person's experience.

Kohut, H. 1977, *The Restoration of the Self*. International Universities Press, New York.

Kohut, H. 1984, *How Does Analysis Cure?* University of Chicago Press.

The following two books provide readable material to help comprehend some of Kohut's writings.

Lee, R. R. & Colby Martin, J. 1991, *Psychotherapy After Kohut: A Textbook of Self Psychology*. The Analytic Press, Hillsdale, New Jersey.

Mollon, P. 2001, *Releasing the Self - The Healing Legacy of Heinz Kohut*. Whurr Publishers, London.

**Winnicott** writes on development of creativity and the 'true' and 'false' self:

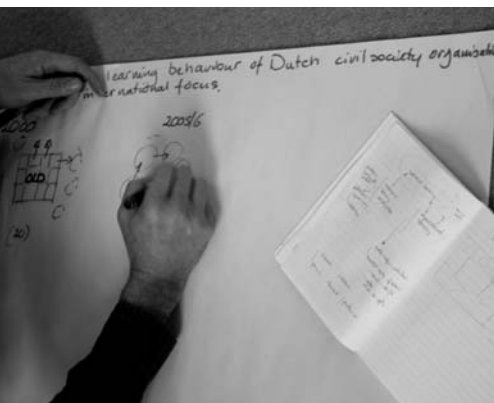
Winnicott, D.W. 1971, *Playing and Reality*. Tavistock/Routledge, Great Britain.

**Tomkins** – known as the 'father of affect theory' – affect being the clinical term used for the physiological response relating to feelings and emotions:

Tomkins, S. 1962-1963, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness - Vol. 1 & 2*. Springer Publishing Company, New York.

“How we balance the “mystic” and “militant” within us, and how we connect personal and social (or political or organisational) change, are things I often ponder. Working on these inner aspects of our being, and connecting them to the outer, are one part of the challenge of how we create, express and respect different forms of knowledge.”

Jethro Pettit



<sup>5</sup>Thanks to my group members for triggering these reflections in me – Patricia, Altastarr, Lawrence, Russell, Julie and Peter.

<sup>6</sup>From Carol Hanisch (1969) *The Personal is Political* in the Red Stockings collection 'Feminist Revolution', 204-205. This refers to the importance of locating personal troubles/problems within the context of public/political issues and, in particular, institutionalized inequalities

**Jones** – expands on the link between self and affect and the need for the integration of our symbolic thinking (cognition) and our affective (feeling) life as a basis for creativity.

Jones, J. M. 1995, *Affects as Process - An Inquiry into the Centrality of Affect in Psychological Life*. The Analytic Press Inc., New Jersey.

**Fonagy et al** provide an up-to-date integration of many of the ideas covered in the references above (and more):

Fonagy, P., Gergely, G., Jurist, E. L. & Target, M. 2004, *Affect Regulation, Mentalisation, and the Development of the Self*. Karnac (Books) Ltd., London.

**Meares** – writes on the development of self – particularly in relation to ‘the other’ and through the process of conversation:

Meares, R. 1993, *The Metaphor of Play*. Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, New Jersey.

Meares, R. 2000, *Intimacy and Alienation - Memory, Trauma and Personal Being*. Routledge, London.

Meares, R. 2004, *An Outline of the Conversational Model*. American Journal of Psychotherapy.

**Goleman** – writes on many dimensions of emotional intelligence for the intelligent lay person and has popularised many ideas and concepts that are emerging with contemporary research into the psyche, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships:

Goleman, D. 1995, *Emotional Intelligence - Why it Can Matter More than IQ*. Bloomsbury, UK.

The following books review some of the latest neuroscientific research into the emotional brain, the self and interpersonal experience.

Damasio, A. R. 1994, *Descartes' Error - Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Damasio, A. 1999, *The Feeling of What Happens - Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. Harcourt Inc.

Damasio, A. 2003, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*. Harcourt Inc., USA.

LeDoux, J. 1996, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York.

LeDoux, J. 2002, *Synaptic Self - How Our Brains Become Who We Are*. Penguin Putnam Inc., New York.

Siegel, D. J. 1999, *The Developing Mind - Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience*. The Guildford Press, New York.

## Reflection - Irene Guijt<sup>5</sup>

Learning By Design

### Reflections and Directions on ‘The Personal’ within Social Change

Who would deny that our personal strengths and inadequacies strongly shape our capacity to be effective in challenging social injustice? Our personal histories influence what we feel is important or not, morally right or not, achievable or not, actionable or not. So why is there relatively little focus on ‘the personal’ among those active in furthering social change?

Yes, many of us know the adage ‘the personal is the political’<sup>6</sup> - and thus at one level we recognise that the personal guides social change work. But that is about making other people’s personal issues – via the institutionalised injustices they suffer – the focus of our efforts. In so doing, we remain intellectually within our heads and politically within the comfort zone of our perspectives on injustice. How many of us focus on understanding and working on ourselves as actors – undertaking a conscious self-development journey of the heart and mind that explicitly meshes with our political and intellectual focus on social change?



*I approach social change work from my experiences within the development sector, where theories of (skewed) development and technical skills in one's chosen profession are generally considered sufficient qualification to 'go and make a difference'. Little is invested in examining our ethical values, our people-skills, our self-understanding, our hang-ups and quirks - and how these affect our decisions and our effectiveness. This is up to us as individuals to recognise, seek out and address.*

*There is more to 'the personal' than these psychology, morality and communication issues. Martin Luther King Jr. is credited with the quote that points to the problems we face as a result: "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men." He refers to an inner inadequacy that leads to suboptimal or abuse of our abilities in other areas. 'Spiritual?' you might wonder, 'Yech!'. For me, the personal very much includes spiritual in a broad sense<sup>7</sup> – not organised religion with its rituals and routines, but the framework of values that gives us internal coherence, purpose and direction, and explains how we are connected with others.*

*So how then, can we start viewing the link between the personal and 'facilitating learning for social change'? Here are some initial, raw thoughts.*

*Linked to 'facilitation', at the simplest level, our state of mind affects the clarity with which we engage. If we are sad or angry or feel unjustly done by or misunderstood or are trying to score a professional victory over a colleague, it affects our capacity to listen and see what needs to be acted on in the bigger picture. Our psychological make-up and background affects how we relate to people and choose to deal with social change. As facilitators, fear of the unknown and conservatism on the one hand or fearless creativity that is blind to people's need for safe space on the other can lead to ineffective or even harmful decisions. If facilitation is "the process of enabling social actors to reflect on their assumptions and make informed choices ..." (from the subgroup on 'conceptual understanding'), then it seems logical that we need to understand our own assumptions and the basis of our own choices to start with. They will influence what and how we choose to facilitate.*

*In terms of 'learning', recognising the personal opens the door for us to invest in our inner learning. 'Learning can bring about personal transformation', as our group noted. At a more practical level it helps us examine ourselves as learners – what comes natural and where do we start feeling uncomfortable? Acknowledging different learning styles and needs is a basic issue in how understanding 'the personal' can help make learning more effective. But it is also about understanding what motivates people to learn. Most development organisations espouse the importance of being 'a learning organisation' but most are blind to the organisational disincentives that inhibit individuals from learning from problems or errors.*

*Linked to 'social change', at a fundamental level, the personal is the driving force in people's choice to engage in specific aspects of social change and the paths we take in that. Take the case of Linda Biehl<sup>8</sup>, whose daughter was murdered and who is now close friends with two of the convicted murderers. Her life revolves around reconciliation and preventing abuse in South Africa. For her, the personal has defined her life of social change work over the past decade and where she choose to invest her energy. All of us can pinpoint personal circumstances that created our paths. If we are not conscious of these influences, then we can be blind to alternatives, other issues, other styles or other needs – which can be a negative influence on our work. So incorporating the personal can enable us to more consciously take a wider view of the issues at stake and the people in it.*

<sup>7</sup> See for one perspective on 'the spiritual' <http://spiderjohnson.com/Pages/definingspirit.html>.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.beyondintractability.org/reflections/peacebuilder\\_profiles/Linda\\_Biehl/Linda\\_Biehl.jsp?nid=6746](http://www.beyondintractability.org/reflections/peacebuilder_profiles/Linda_Biehl/Linda_Biehl.jsp?nid=6746)



So what practical paths are there to look at 'the personal'? While my own view is coloured by exposure to Buddhist thought and therefore values how meditative practice can foster lucidity and self-awareness, there are many other paths to foster personal insight and transformation, including psychotherapy, peer groups and crises. But it can be as simple as asking certain questions about the personal when engaged in change processes, such as asking those involved to articulate their version of spirituality and where it connects with social injustice. At the very least, it obliges us to examine the role and balance between collective and individual transformation.

If the dialogue on 'facilitating learning for social change' wants to add value to existing efforts, then an important avenue that needs exploring, even if with some trepidation, is the integration of the personal into social change work. Questions that come to mind (and will have very context-specific responses) include:

1. What is the role of 'the personal' in social change processes? Is it about morality, ethics, spiritual values, self-understanding, clarity of mind, or something entirely different?
2. Where does it affect social change as a positive force or as an obstacle?
3. How can we build in (safe) space for examining the personal when pursuing our intellectual and political social change projects?
4. How can personal transformation enhance social change – what is a healthy balance between individual and collective change? And what can organisations do to foster congruence between the personal dimension and societal change?



### 3: The Organisational Dimension

**S**ummary: we believe that many organisations need to undergo major shifts in the way they support and facilitate learning for social change. They need to re-imagine the way they learn, and not just for the sake of learning or merely for practice. They need to reconsider their size, function and culture, and the way they achieve a synergy between social and personal transformation.

**What are the factors that are necessary in order to become a learning organisation, and how these are connected to other organisations, networks and wider society?**

Even when individuals do not agree, organisational learning can still take place. Individuals can develop arguments and counter arguments, new insights and counter insights, and thus participate in a process of interactive learning that may result in a higher level of organisational knowledge.

Henk Molenaar

During the workshop, the discussion sometimes shifted indiscriminately between organisational learning and the issue of learning organisations. Although the theme of 'Facilitating Learning for Social Change' does not fit squarely into any particular category of the literature, there is a general region within which the discussion was situated. Namely, discussion on the obstacles to organizational learning, and how to achieve more wide spread learning is related to the literature on learning organizations that distinguishes single-, double- and triple-loop learning. The following quotation provides a useful insight into these different "levels" of learning:

*"The writing<sup>9</sup> on learning organisations is also normative in the sense that it encourages organisations to go beyond 'single-loop learning', which often focuses on finding efficiencies and dealing with first order problems (symptoms), to double- and even triple-loop learning. In double-loop learning, organisations consistently test assumptions, identify the roots of problems, and are open to fundamental rethinking of strategy. Organisations practising double-loop learning are open to examining how organisational practice diverges from 'espoused theory' and addressing these inconsistencies (for example, an organisation that espouses gender equality would be willing to examine the extent to which it lives its own values and make the necessary changes). In triple-loop learning, the highest form of organisational self-examination, people are open to questioning the very raison d'être of the organisation."* (Roper and Pettit, 2002)

In considering the organisational dimension of FLASC, we are very much concerned, therefore, with pushing learning within organisations to new limits; from double- to triple-loop learning. This is not just learning for the sake of learning, or even for better practice, but learning for social change, which places more substantive demands on the outcomes of the learning processes. There are many examples of how different groups have achieved this, and also of how some organisations seem perpetually resistant to such learning, as revealed in the box below.

<sup>9</sup> There is much out there in the way of literature, and a variety of perspectives. For a good summary, see *Learning for Development: A literature review* by Katherine Pasteur (2004). There is also a double issue of *Development in Practice* (2002, Vol.12, No. 3 and 4) that is devoted to development and the learning organisation.



*A reason why I decided to step out from large development organisations is because their language doesn't match their actions.*

Alfonso Gumucio

*A certain measure of diversity within an organisation is a pre-requisite for organisational learning. When there is no diversity (only true believers) learning does not take place. But when positions become too entrenched, learning again becomes very difficult. Learning - not only organisational learning but also individual learning - is a social process. It cannot be detached from power relations and other factors influencing social interaction.*

Henk Molenaar

### Box 1: Diverse perspectives on Organisational Learning

- Management science: concerned with gathering and processing information in and about the organisation
- Sociology and organisation theory: focus on the broader social systems and organisational structure where learning becomes embedded and which affect organisational learning
- Strategic perspective: focuses on competition, and the ways in which learning gives one organisation an advantage over another
- Production management: looks at the relationship between learning and organisational productivity and efficiency.
- Cultural perspective: describes how organisational and national cultures are a significant cause and effect of organisational learning
- The learning organisation: concerned with implementation, and the characteristics of organisations which are able to effectively share and use knowledge to achieve organisational goals.

Source: Easterby Smith, 1997<sup>10</sup>

### What factors facilitate learning in organisations?

There are many ways that learning may be facilitated within organisations. The following are some examples, noting that the history, culture, mandate and membership of an organisation may also determine how learning takes place:

- openness to new ideas and challenges
- exposure to the outside world, close relationship to people and communities, in touch with reality
- direct pressure from grassroots groups and social change leaders to keep looking for new solutions to desperate problems
- willingness to surface, identify and cope with issues of power and differing agendas
- capacity to think creatively (rather than being skilled in focusing in depth on a single subject, having a very bureaucratic background, etc)
- an organizational culture which consciously creates 'active ferment' and places value on and provides incentives for challenging and learning
- allocation of time/space/resources/structure which encourage learning
- mechanisms which support critical, participatory reflection
- skilled change leadership that:
  - has a strategy for creating learning and change
  - understands theory of change leadership
  - creates a change leadership team
  - is facilitative
- external interventions and facilitation can provide critical stimulus and tools for learning

Action Aid International was cited on numerous occasions as an example of an organisation that has embraced change and transformation, recognising that there were numerous internal and external factors that helped this to occur. Some of these were identified as follows:

- It had a visionary leader who grew to the top from the front line of the organisation. So the leadership that was in complete touch with the ground realities. The leadership also had the qualities that you have already captured.

<sup>10</sup> Cunliffe A and Easterby-Smith MPV, 2004, *From reflection to practical reflexivity: experiential learning as lived experience*, in *Organizing Reflection*, (eds) Reynolds PM and Vince R, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, pp 30-46,

*In ActionAid, I was fortunate enough to be part of many of its significant strategic evolutions - from service delivery to public policy. This has given me first hand experience of honest attempts by a variety of people and organisations, to bring about change.*

*There were a good number of ActionAiders who understood their role as being a change agent (an old term, but still relevant) rather than merely a 'professional' INGO staff. INGO garb was only a means to achieve change.*

*In many ways, the personal role that is assumed by INGO/ NGO 'professionals' is also an important factor in the learning for social change discussion. Not from a missionary perspective, but from a 'personal politics' perspective – the importance of walking the talk.*

Tom Thomas

- The leader also identified and created a critical mass of staff from within the organisation – who shared the vision
- Created very compelling arguments for change based on field/ community work experience. For example, the need to work in partnership mode with local NGOs rather than implement direct programmes was pushed using the India experience.
- Also built alliances within the Board and internationalised the governance structure

It seems important to create mechanisms inside organizations for incorporating the voice of the constituencies, or "consumers" as a way to ensure learning practices that allow groups to be in touch with the realities/problems faced by our constituencies and the "real" world outside the organizations. These kinds of practices may bring accountability to balance power and authority. In a research initiative at the UK Department for International Development (DFID), for example, there are efforts to incorporate the voice of the people served by programs.

In the US, community organizing groups have developed several processes which facilitate learning. These include:

- Debriefing immediately after every 'action' so that all the participants can evaluate what went well, what didn't, and how they could handle similar situations more effectively in the future
- Each organizer files weekly written reports summarizing the number of new people they have contacted, what issues have surfaced, how many are interested in coming to a meeting to discuss those issues, how many spoke up in meetings for the first time, how many new people assumed leadership, etc.
- Each organizer also writes periodic reflections on the progress they are making, and these are shared with their peers and supervisor and are the basis for face to face critiques and training sessions
- Participatory research involving community people directly in researching issues which concern them, and then involving them in drawing conclusions, recommendations and action plans from that process

**Are there any real-life examples of organisations that have achieved a working synergy between social and personal transformation? Why did the organisation take this on? How did they do it? What did or did not work? If no examples available, what does this tell us?**

There are some known examples of organizations that have been able to achieve some synergy between social and personal transformation. The origins and missions of some organizations from the US-based "Leadership for a Changing World" program have resulted or were influenced by the personal experiences/transformation of their members, (for example HIV organizations created by people living with AIDS, organizations created by incarcerated women who are now advocating for better conditions in prisons and for dealing with the social causes that brought them to prisons). The process of emotional healing, creation of awareness and commitment, issue framing, and advocacy are inseparable from the social transformation experienced by the organization leaders and members.

Personal transformation is a necessary factor for organizational change even among progressive organizations. Some immigrant/labor organizations in the USA that have made great progress in organizational issues have also faced internal challenges associated with gender (sexism and/or homophobia) or racial issues within their constituencies, staff and members. The organizations have responded to these challenges by creating awareness and education initiatives and opening spaces for reflection and dialogue. These changes have brought both personal and organizational transformation.

## Does the size of organisations matter, in their capacity to manage learning and change?

There appear to be different tendencies towards change processes in large organisations and small organisations.

### Large organisations

- Large organizations' resistance to change can be contested or challenged only through organized pressure coming from the civil society. The key issue is power: Social movements must play an important role in making large organizations accountable and open to learning and change. Collective action and pressure from the ground-up can help organizations to become accountable to social movements and society at large. However, even with that pressure, it is almost impossible to change large institutions. Examples of resistance to change in larger organisations, such as UNESCO, were illustrative of this point.
- Inside/outside strategies can be effective. In reality everyone is powerless to change major institutions on their own, even the Boards and CEOs of such organizations. The best hope is in conducting a power analysis and identifying potential allies inside and outside the institution and then linking them.
- If social movements are to hold major institutions to account, they must be independent and not simply co-opted. Major institutions must be pushed to provide continuing space, access, tools and resources which help social movements expand their influence and grow to have larger impact. Independent funding is of enormous importance in reducing the danger of co-optation.
- It has proved difficult to cite examples of large organisations changing their approach to be more open to learning possibilities.

### Smaller organisations

- lots of approaches have been successful in changing smaller organizations
- a 'change' leadership team
- constituency pressure
- exposure to external influences, ideas, models, crisis etc.
- assessment and organisational learning processes which shake things up

### Reflection: Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla

Research Center for Leadership in Action, RCLA,  
Robert Wagner Graduate School of Public Service,  
New York University

### My Reflections on the workshop 'Facilitating Knowledge for Social Change'

*In my view, the workshop provided a great space for reflecting on our diverse approaches to learning, knowledge, and communication, and for examining how they may either support or inhibit social change. I enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to have this dialogue with a group of amazing individuals working in diverse fields at the international level, who represented a rich variety of experiences and voices.*

*The workshop also provided the right combination of sound facilitation and participatory methodologies to create a safe space for sharing our experiences. This was an exchange where we were also able to challenge each other from our own perspectives and world views. Of course, the conversations were difficult at times. We all felt some frustration with the limited time available to address such complex issues. Personally, I would have loved to hear the voices of the grass roots organizations and leaders with whom we work. Their voices were absent and would have enriched the conversation.*



Overall, I feel that the discussions that took place within the organizational group, allowed me to shed light on particular questions I had regarding methodologies we could use to support knowledge and learning within our Center and with people involved in our programs. But more importantly, the workshop allowed me to challenge my assumptions about knowledge and social change and generate many questions for further inquiry. In particular, four questions come to mind:

1. How can we create practices within our organizations which allow us to hear and incorporate the multiple voices of the people and constituencies that we work with and those that we are supposed to serve?

2. How can we create meaningful collaborations with other organizations (at the local, national and international level) in order to advance mutual learning and support positive change and transformation?

3. In what ways are we and our organizations responding to the present challenges brought by complex globalization processes which are also affecting our way of knowing, learning and as a consequence, our work?

4. How can we go beyond our own individual and organizational interests and agendas to create inclusive initiatives that benefit the multiple people and organizations that we work with?

As a result of this event I also realized that we, as practitioner or academics working on the field of social change, need to ensure appropriate spaces and methodologies for reflecting on our work. Why not also think of ourselves as active social change agents who must be responsible for ensuring change within our organizations? In this light, we are then responsible for ensuring that our organizations and programs respond to the present demands and current issues and needs faced by our constituencies and the world. In that capacity, we must ensure room for reflection, reassessing, and challenging our own assumptions as we apply this learning through our workplace and the people with whom we work.



During the workshop, the organizational group understood these needs and proposed a way to ensure the continuation of the effort initiated by the IDS. The group suggested cooperative inquiry groups as a methodology that would allow us to have time and space to further our initial inquiry and discussions initiated during the forum. We believe that cooperative inquiry will also allow us to implement some actions together with the reflection process. In a cooperative inquiry group, approximately 8 individuals meet with the desire to reflect on an issue or question of common interest. The group usually meets for 4 or five times, over a period of a year and a half. During this time, the group tries to answer the question through a process of action and reflection. The group also develops tasks to be accomplished between each meeting.

We accomplished a great deal during the two day workshop at the Dunford House. I feel that we have just begun a journey which we must continue in order to reach a better understanding and cooperation between those who wish to be engaged in this process. I am looking forward to seeing a continuation of this effort. I am confident that together we will gain a tremendous wealth of insights and tools to implement in our work.

## 4: The methodological dimension

**S**ummary: We need to address the tension between fostering of collective and group identities while also allowing individual values and beliefs to flourish freely. We should use not only methodologies that foster learning cultures but we should also consider the broader assumptions that underlie the methods when putting them into practice.

“It is necessary to share the information and the tools, but then we must respect and/or try to understand the decisions taken by others concerning their way to deal with the matters they are learning. It might not be ours, but it is theirs and we are not allowed to impose or manipulate a way of action. Otherwise, we would be acting as those in power and control.”

Natalia Diaz

### What approaches or methods can support the emergence of group identity, whilst allowing individual identity based on different sets of values and beliefs, to flourish and shape group identity?

There is an intrinsic value, for organisations that wish to respond in creative ways to complex social issues, in seeking to strengthen social and cultural diversity in the make-up of the organisation. As a first step in this direction, approaches are needed which will strengthen understanding and pride in the value of diversity within the organisation.

At one level this requires developing conceptual clarity and commitment to diversity as part of the vision, mission, purpose and values. At a procedural level, many lessons can be learned from experiences of affirmative action and other diversity policies in recruitment. However, a diverse workforce does not in itself result in a culture of diversity; more can be done through training and workshops on race, gender, disability, age, ethnicity, etc.

At a practical level, there are useful methods for identifying and naming social identities and power relations in the workplace, and using as part of processes of internal learning in order to build awareness of differences, better recognise power issues, and improve representation of diversity in decision making.

Methods of reflective practice, reflexivity and self-awareness have an important role to play in these processes, and include reflective writing, journaling, auto-ethnography, peer mentoring and peer feedback.<sup>11</sup> These methods can enhance awareness of diversity by allowing staff to explore and share their own diverse perspectives, identities, values and resources.

There will always be a certain tension between striving toward an articulation of shared values (or group identity) - essential for an organisation to be effective - and the need to have a culture of respect for different values (individual identities). There is a need for some overlap, convergence and alignment, as well as for diversity. Organisations need to reflect on the optimal level of group identity vs. individual identities; diversity and homogeneity.

<sup>11</sup> For some useful beginning resources on reflective practice and reflective writing for professional development, see Bolton (1999) and Moon (2004)

## What kind of methodologies create an organisational learning culture?

There are two parts to this challenge: the first is to identify and strengthen the underlying *principles* leading to a culture of learning, and the second is to learn from *practical examples* of such a culture of learning in action.

Some *underlying principles* of organisational learning include:

- Making time and space to reflect together; and creating safe spaces to enable critical feedback;
- Stimulating collective learning, beyond the individual level, and creating joint learning opportunities (e.g. with other organisations)
- Creating opportunities for experiential learning and focussed action learning, without pre-determined outcomes in mind;
- Creating transparency, openness, and access to information; non-transparency limits learning
- Strengthening downward forms of accountability and abolishing time-consuming upward reporting
- Individual and group learning can be oriented toward what it means to be change agents, not just learning for its own sake.

There are many *practical examples* and ideas for organisational learning, however these may not work unless there is a strong learning culture in place. It is important for leaders to lead by example:

- Staff development and learning can be rewarded and linked to progression opportunities within an organisation;
- Learning objectives can be set by individuals (through learning contracts and self-assessment) or at the level of a team or division.
- Internal learning processes or facilitated group enquiry within an organisation (action research, cooperative inquiry, learning groups)<sup>12</sup>
- Exposure to other realities, such as mini-sabbaticals or "immersions" with clients, e.g. poor and marginalised people
- Creating and strengthening "Pockets of learning" within ideologically dominated organisations, where there may not be a culture of learning
- Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) in ActionAid (required at all levels, with light reporting)
- Reading Weeks (in a group retreat format, away from work, with light facilitation and inputs; IDS has done this with DIFD and Oxfam)
- "Home week", when all staff agree to be present for reflection and exchange (CDRA does this in Cape Town, once per month)

## What methods and approaches can be used to enable learning and unlearning for positive social change?

This question poses challenges at two three levels: (a) methods for learning for *individuals* working as social change agents; and (b) learning to support social change beyond organisations;

### (a) *learning for individuals working as change agents*

At the level of principles, it is important that change agents "do it themselves" before facilitating others to do things; this can be achieved through immersions, field work and other ways of gaining experiential understandings.

<sup>12</sup> For useful resources on action research and cooperative inquiry within organisations, see for example McNiff (2002), Fisher et al (2003), and Heron and Reason (2001)



Change agents also need to engage in learning which helps them to become aware of their own mindsets, but this is often difficult. This requires taking time to reflect on what you do, to take time out of daily practice in order to discuss, write and link your experience to theory.

This can be helped by structured programmes and incentives such as those noted above for reflective practice and learning, and may include internal inquiry groups, writers' circles (for giving feedback on writing; internal seminars and developmental counselling

It can help to have firm deadlines and outputs associated with these activities, while allowing for diversity and emergence. Organisations should think creatively about how they use their training budgets, and to remember that training does not always equal learning.

(b) *Learning how to support social change beyond the organisation.*

What qualities or capacities are needed to become an effective advisor or facilitator of social change? There are many aspects of this, but among the most important are those related to knowing yourself and developing capacities of reflexivity and self-awareness. We need to be able to see the question behind the question, and to know which role to play at different moments in the process. We also need to learn about social change and to keep up to date with the trends, issues and strategies involved in social change work.

*The old cliché - 'You can only change yourself, not others' - really began to be meaningful for me when looking at the organisation for which I was working and how its senior management persistently refused to explore and reflect on itself. Thus, I became interested in exploring themes of organisational learning and change as a means to wider systemic change.*

Rosalind Eyben

There is a gap remaining in this discussion, which is the range of experiences and methodologies in which communities facilitate their own learning, within and from each other; self facilitation; and the kinds of social change which occur through self-reproducing ideas and behaviours, rather than outside interventions.

**What theories of knowledge, worldviews and assumptions underlie these methods?**

Learning is not a product or an endpoint, but a continuous process of creating knowledge. Which can be summed this up with the expression: "there's no arrival, only a journey". Social change is also constant (or as the saying goes, "there is nothing permanent but change"), and so learning must be a continuing process. Another way of expressing this is as follows:

*"if learning is a process in time, knowledge is now" and  
"in any given moment, there are many knowledges"*

Knowledge is being formed and dissolved all the time, and in different ways by different people. Knowledge and learning are often (but not always) seen as social phenomena, or processes of collective construction of meanings. Both are also multi-dimensional, although we often assume them to be cognitive and analytical processes. Education specialists, particularly in adult learning, have long observed that conceptual sense-making is only one dimension of learning and knowledge. Changes in understanding and behaviour are more likely to occur where learners cycle through a variety of learning modes, including the iteration of action, reflection, conceptualisation and practice (Kolb 1985) or combining experiential, presentational, propositional and practical forms of learning and knowing (Heron 1999). There may be a difference between how we learn about things (more didactic) and about people (more experiential).

Learning can also be thought of as tacit or explicit; and it may be experienced primarily in an auditory, visual or kinesthetic way, often depending upon the learner. Both learning and knowledge may be emotive, intuitive, embodied or spiritual in nature – including what we



may consider to be cerebral or rational sense-making. Theory therefore can be inductive and intuitive, shaped by subtle and embedded subjectivities, and nested within or informed by other dimensions of knowing.

Organisational and personal learning and change are clearly connected, but it is not unusual for individuals to learn and develop knowledge without having an effect at the organisational level. At the same time, small events and moments can have critical systemic effects, as is known from analysis of "path dependency", paradigms and interdependencies.

### Gaps and ideas for action

From these key considerations about the methodological challenges of facilitating change, new issues arise which are in need of further exploration. A key theme is that of social change as a phenomenon of self-reproducing ideas, actions and behaviours, driven by embedded actors (vs. seeing it as the product of outside facilitation or interventions). Some issues to consider include:

**Horizontal and spontaneous social change.** There is more we need to learn about processes of horizontal learning and spread, self-facilitation within and among groups, communities, networks and social movements. For example, it is known that much learning occurs through by informal visiting, seeing different realities, and exchanging experiences. Development practice has long recognised the value of exchange visits, such as farmer-to-farmer visits, community to community exchanges; South-South exchanges, and methods of popular communication, video and radio.

**Organisational innovations at the grassroots.** More could be learned about the organisational and social movement dimensions of these forms of grassroots learning and exchange, and what forms of organisation can be supported to facilitate horizontal learning for social change. How can we better support and encourage processes and capacities of learning in context, learning "by and for the people"? Action research and other forms of mutual learning, in which people do their own research, create knowledge, communicate and use their knowledge locally, with minimal if any outside intervention, need to be better understood.

**Pockets of learning.** In larger, ideologically dominated organisations, learning and change are not sanctioned or supported from above, in official ways, but occur through individual or small group initiatives. We need to know more about how to do this effectively, and to support these change agents. Related to this is the challenge of sustainability of learning: when learning is localised in particular people or groups, how does it become mainstreamed and sustained as part of institutional practice and memory, particularly when organisational cultures are resistant to change?

**Personal learning to be a change agent.** Finally, there is the challenge of how facilitators of change themselves learn to be agents of change. There is a need for a more robust understanding of the disciplines of reflective practice for people working in the fields of development and social change. Part of this challenge (though by no means all of it), is the question of how change agents can maintain awareness of their rapidly changing contexts and environments, and for continuous processes and capacities of learning at different levels.

“Significant organisational change is needed for donors to be effective at reducing poverty. This includes recognizing that front-line staff are crucial for spotting and supporting processes of positive change.”

Michael Edwards

**Reflection: Robert Wasaga**

Programme Coordinator

Civil Society and Poverty Reduction Programme

Kampala, Uganda

*First, the reflections at Dunford were very rewarding as it enabled me to refine my practice. Civil society networks, which purport to facilitate positive social change, form a very big constituency of the programme I lead. The discussions we had enabled me to explore and apply some of the methodologies so as to trigger learning for social change.*

*Reflections: Where do the individual social change activists get the passion to embark on such an insurmountable task? It is insurmountable because it has to do with suppressing one's self and letting others to prevail over your personal ego and power. In addition, why do people attempt to facilitate others to learn and socially change without changing themselves? Is it possible to be a facilitator for social change to others but not to one's self? At the core of any social change initiative is the individual; we need to study this individual.*

*Where do facilitators for social change get the commitment to undertake this task? How did they get themselves there? Why do facilitators of learning for social change feel uncomfortable to share their weaknesses with others? What is the role of self-criticism in this process? What about the role of political consciousness in facilitating learning for social change at all levels?*

*If I was asked what my priorities are, I would list a number of areas such as exploring practical and effective methodologies for learning for social change, horizontal learning processes etc. But having reflected on the subject, I would desire to explore learning for social change at individual level. I have tried to map out some social change activists in Uganda. I have identified some people, who I feel are genuine activists (of-course genuine may be subjective). Already, I am starting to question the role of religion in learning for social change. Is facilitating social change a life-long change mission? Can it be a time-framed initiative (project) or one-off event? Perhaps, these are areas I will be exploring with my respondents in the future.*

*Why do people attempt to facilitate others to learn and socially change without changing themselves? Is it possible to be a facilitator for social change to others without changing one's self?*

Robert Waswaga

# Moving forward

**M**oving forward from an initiative such as FLASC is challenging for several reasons. Firstly, those who have participated in the dialogue so far have a very wide range of interests; although there is much common ground, it is never easy to identify key, specific actions which seem relevant and exciting to all members of such an eclectic group. Also, there is a realisation that the dialogue is still at a relatively early stage; many individuals have been considering such ideas and issues for a long time, but there appears to have been no real concerted effort to bring together such individuals or groups around a common area of inquiry. Finally, we are very aware that those engaged in the dialogue so far represent a very small proportion of a much larger group of people who are deeply committed to facilitating learning for social change. For all these reasons, we recognise that there is a real need to take forward the dialogue with a wider group or organisations and individuals, and to ensure that it is linked to practice, as well as to further conceptualisation.

We believe, based on the feedback and inspiration of different FLASC participants, that there is a great deal more to be done, and offer the following suggestions as a way of moving forward:

## **1. Establish cooperative inquiry groups into specific issues related to FLASC**

These might relate to each of the four key areas explored in this report (conceptual, personal, organisational, methodological), or to a cross-cutting theme that draws on each of these as means of understanding how they relate and interplay with each other. Cooperative inquiry groups would form around a specific theme, and develop the theme collectively. The cooperative inquiry groups could work at a distance, but also meet together through a structured programme, drawing on additional expertise where needed, for example in research methodologies, or in relation to the theme itself. The inquiries would have two main purposes:

- each person learns and strengthens practice
- the group sets standards for development from a social and participatory point of view.

From our discussions so far, we believe the following themes have great potential:

### **Encouraging learning cultures in organisations:**

How to immunise organisations against doing harm by seeding pockets of learning and supporting groups and individuals open to learning and change? Why do organisational incentives and disincentives have the effect they do on learning and social change?

### **Support of horizontal learning from below:**

How to relate local and global knowledge in theory and practice? How to strengthen lateral learning and mutual knowledge creation at grassroots levels (e.g. social movements, community-based organisations) and how can this be communicated?

### **Developing and applying reflective practice:**

How can we develop more robust approaches to reflective practice amongst those engaged in social change processes? Why does engaging with "the personal" matter in relation to social change, and how can it be encouraged?

### **New institutions, partnerships and spaces:**

How can we work with and influence both powerful players and grassroots groups? What practical strategies can help to improve the quality of the public space? What new institutional forms could enhance dialogue in order to facilitate learning for social change? How can new technologies support communication of different forms of knowledge? How can existing institutions such as Higher Education institutions contribute to FLASC? How can greater accountability be achieved within relationships between different actors in social change processes?

## **2. Developing frameworks, stories and mapping in relation to FLASC**

We recognise that there is still much to learn through this dialogue, and that more ground work is needed to create a basis for action, as well as further conceptual development. The conceptual framework offered in this report is a helpful start, but we need to discover more about how different organisations actually support learning for social change; we need a more comprehensive mapping of ideas, theory and practice feeding into the dialogue that will help to move it forward; and we need to frame this ongoing dialogue and inquiry within the bigger picture and history of social change, and take it out to a wider audience.

## **3. Exchanges and sharing of knowledge and learning**

Based on the experience of different participants in the dialogue, we see a wide range of opportunities to support exchange and sharing of knowledge and learning in relation to FLASC, as follows:

- Periodic exposures, cross-visits and exchanges amongst practitioners
- Immersions of decision-makers and policy-makers directly in contexts where social change is occurring
- Developing and sharing "how to" materials and curricula on reflexivity and reflective practice
- Creating safe learning spaces to help powerful people recognise and overcome their disabilities, e.g. through mini-sabbaticals, reading and reflection weeks
- Sensitising "the powerful": people in government, bureaucracy, donor agencies, e.g. through workshops on "diversity", or "power", or through sessions on reflective practice
- Facilitating and supporting action and participatory research by poor people into knowledge and empowerment associated with the social change processes that they are themselves involved in
- Providing facilitation training for a wide range of organisational employees
- Encourage greater interaction, sharing of stories and experience, between researchers, policy makers and practitioners using alternative means of communication

**Reconvening for further face-to-face dialogue**

Although email and other new technologies offer wonderful opportunities to communicate and make connections, a great advantage of the FLASC workshop was the possibility for participants from very different backgrounds to come together and address complex issues and problems in a more sustained, focused and direct way, and also to develop personal relationships which can provide a real basis for further cooperation. We believe that more such opportunities are needed, thus providing a means by which a wider group of participants may engage around these issues, and also feed in, and receive feedback on, the progress and outcomes of the cooperative inquiries.

# Links to other initiatives and resources

The following are a list of initiatives similar to FLASC, as well as other relevant sources.

- **Pelican Initiative: Platform for Evidence-based Learning & Communications for Social Change** <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/pelican/>
- **Learning and Teaching for Transformation** – A global dialogue exploring relationships between education, participation and social change  
<http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/guides/ltt/index.htm>
- **D groups** does not have the same content focus, but does serve as a method to mobilise joint thinking around development themes and issues. Design of the process and involvement is a prerequisite for success and effectivity. It is the starting point for fostering groups and communities in international development. It is a partnership which caters to both individuals and organisations by offering tools and services that bring people together. Whether you are trying to support a team, a group, a network, a partnership or a community, D groups hope to provide others with the capacity to do this in an environment which is simple, non-commercial, respectful of privacy, and targeted at low bandwidth users in the South.
- **The Practice to Theory Working Group** led by Ceasar McDowell at MIT and Sonia Ospina at NYU
- **The Learning for Social Change network** led by Andy Mott (with its sister network outside the US led by John Gaventa and Irene Guijt)
- **Multi-stakeholder initiative** at Wageningen University
- **The International Learning Group on University Education for Community Change** (also led by Andy Mott - not yet up and running)
- **The Engaged University network** managed by Ted Howard at the University of Maryland (also connects into the broader network of universities dealing with civic education, community partnerships etc).  
Contact Ted at [thoward@civilsociety.umd.edu](mailto:thoward@civilsociety.umd.edu)



#### 4: Agenda from the FLASC workshop: Framework for the Conversations

##### TUESDAY

afternoon, evening      Arrive at Dunford, starting to meet, talk, getting to know each other. Supper

##### WEDNESDAY

morning      Introductions, framing the background for this initiative and the overall process planned so far, with a view on where we are heading

Stories of social change – individual reflection of a social change story from your own experience or observation; sharing of these in small groups with the purpose of exploring the story at a deep level, drawing on questions such as:

- What social change took place? What changes in norms of thinking, behaviour and relationships were identified?
- What interventions, strategies and actions occurred?
- What motivations and incentives were at work?
- What knowledge was generated, was this communicated more widely, and if so, how?
- What processes of learning occurred, who learned, what, how, from whom?

Lunch

Further group discussion.

What are the emerging themes, issues, challenges and questions from these stories?

Plenary – bringing the group outputs together, beginning to frame, link and shape our learning and understanding

##### THURSDAY

morning      Recap and agreement on process

"Provocative statements".

Questions on facilitating learning for social change.

Four groups (personal, conceptual, organisational and methodological dimensions) pose questions and respond

Lunch

afternoon

Groups continue discussions.

Presentations drawing on both dialogical and non-dialogical (i.e. beyond propositional language and text) ways to capture and express these

Plenary session to feedback group findings.

##### FRIDAY

What will we do with what we have found?

- Strategies and approaches?
- Lessons and ways forward for us as individuals, as a group, as members of communities/organisations, and more widely in society?

Lunch

afternoon

Personal interests in relation to FLASC. Final reflections on key moments of learning, and potentials for action.

##### Closing

# The participants



## **Facilitating Learning for Social Change Workshop**

Feb 28 - 3 Mar 06

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# learning for social change

exploring concepts,  
methods & practice

*"We, as practitioners or academics working on the field of social change, need to ensure appropriate spaces and methodologies for reflecting on our work. Why not also think of ourselves as active social change agents who must be responsible for ensuring change within our organisations? In this light we are then responsible for ensuring that our organisations and programmes respond to the present demands and current issues and needs faced by our constituencies and the world".*

Amparo Hoffman-Pinilla, Wagner Graduate School of Public Service,  
New York University

*"There are strong reasons to invest in improving the quality of the dialogue process through which people make decisions, the quality of the information on which they make them, and in the opportunities they have to articulate, communicate and organise around the conclusions they reach".*

James Deane, Communication for Social Change Consortium

Global forces are channelling voices of the world's citizens into ever narrower spaces. The influence of increasingly powerful economic, cultural, social and political ideologies are becoming the mainstream. Those who think and see the world differently find it harder to make their voices heard. Institutions and organisations engaged in the support of social change are facing challenges in accessing knowledge generated through the learning of different actors.

There is a need now to share learning and build knowledge collectively, in order to enrich society everywhere, for the benefit of all.

This report seeks to deepen understanding of these challenges by reflecting on the outcomes of the "Facilitating learning for social change" initiative.



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